QuickTime Live!

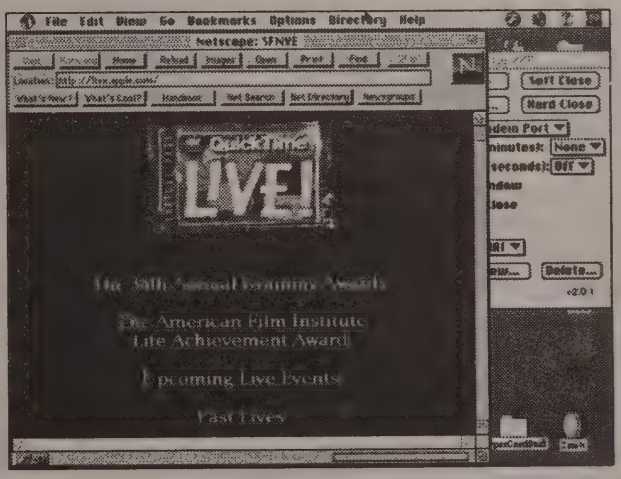
Apple Tries Its Hand At Cybercasting

"Broadcasting live and direct to the Internet" is not a common catchphrase yet, but as Internet-savvy companies explore the realities of "cybercasting," it may become one.

Several companies have released tools that make it possible for people to see and hear live events via the Internet. RealAudio lets you listen to the news in real time, and Internet Phone lets you chat with your buddies using the net. On January 4, New York City-based SenseNet Inc. graced the net with bands ranging from Joan Jett & The Blackhearts to Miss Guy and The Toilet Boys during "Live and In Concert," perhaps the most heavily attended Internet concert to date (*http://inconcert.com/*).

Apple Computer is on the cybercasting bandwagon, too. The company calls its technology "QuickTime Live!" and describes it as a "virtual venue for live, interactive, on-line entertainment." The "venue" is a Web site (*http://live.apple.com*) where Apple places pictures, sounds, movie snippets, and other multimedia doodads from selected events. Or, in the parlance of Apple's wordy press release: "QuickTime Live! makes it possible for people to view live events over the Internet, bridging the gap between real-time and virtual space."

Apple debuted QuickTime Live! on December 31, 1995, with "cybercasted" events from Bill Graham's San Francisco New Year's Eve party. Still pictures, audio clips, and videos were available in near real time, apparently so people stuck at home on New Year's Eve could watch others having a better time than they were.



If you want to view a QuickTime movie from the Internet, you have to wait for the entire file to download before seeing so much as the first frame.

OLD ANSWERS TO NEW PROBLEMS

Although the content may prove to be worthwhile, QuickTime live is not a product rollout; it's more of a stylized marketing scam. Apple makes it clear that its own products—the QuickTake camera, QuickTime VR, and Apple Workgroup Servers—are used to create the Live! con-

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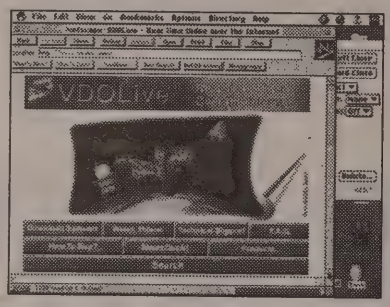
QUICKTIME *continued...*

tent. One might hope that the site would feature new software—perhaps a program to let you download and view QuickTime movies in real time. No such luck—Apple is relying on existing programs like RealAudio and Netscape Navigator for client use.



This alone is disappointing. If you want to view a QuickTime movie from the Internet, you have to wait for the entire file to download before seeing so much as the first frame. Since QuickTime movies can be very large, it can take several minutes to transfer even a short video clip. There currently isn't a way to download and watch movies (in QuickTime or any other format) in real time, or "streaming" format, on the Macintosh. VDOLive (*http://www.vdolive.com/*) does a fine job of offering streaming video for Windows users, but VDOLive isn't yet available for the Macintosh. When it becomes available, it isn't likely that it will support the QuickTime format.

Apple dropped the ball with QuickTime Live!, offering existing, mediocre software for its Internet "cybercasting," although the company is in a unique position to create a new standard for live video on the Mac.

CONTENT IS THE NAME OF THE GAME

Future events include coverage of Touchstone Pictures' upcoming thriller *Ransom*, and the announcement of award winners at the Sundance Film Festival.

If Apple is going to be a serious contender in this "cybercasting" game, it needs to learn very quickly that just because it's slapped a live event on the net doesn't make it interesting. Ask yourself: Would you pay attention for more than fifteen seconds if CNN did a story about the release of *Ransom*, or thirty seconds about the winners of a film festival? Probably not. Does Apple believe that people will spend minutes downloading pictures and sounds from these nonevents? Once the novelty wears off, people won't.

Still, you can appreciate Apple's angle: show off some products, form some partnerships with content providers, get people interested in the technology. These are certainly worthy goals, but Apple could be doing so much more with the QuickTime Live! concept.

Once in a while, a company like Apple unveils an incredible multimedia resource. But it doesn't look like QuickTime Live! will be one. The lack of specialized software and absence of interesting content for QuickTime Live! indicates that Apple is only giving lip service to the revolution of Internet multimedia. ■

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